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Monument Butte Oil and Gas Project Decision Allows Energy Development to Proceed, While Protecting Sensitive Resources

BLM Issues Record of Decision Approving 5,800-well Infill Project in Uintah Basin

VERNAL, UTAH -- Oil and gas development in parts of Duchesne and Uintah counties can move forward, while effects to air quality, threatened plants and fish, and wetlands will be minimized under a decision announced today by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The decision announced today approves the preferred alternative in the “Monument Butte Areas Oil and Gas Final Environmental Impact Statement.” That alternative was the result of close collaboration among BLM, Newfield Exploration Company, the Environmental Protection Agency, State of Utah and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was a key to reaching the decision.

The infill development plan includes 119,743 acres of an existing oil-and-gas producing area that currently has more than 3,000 wells on federal, state and private land south of Myton, Utah. The BLM’s decision to allow “infill” drilling to aid in the secondary recovery of oil and gas resources in the area allows the development of up to 5,750 new oil and gas wells, plus roads, pipelines and other infrastructure, subject to applicable conditions of approval and mitigation requirements in the Record of Decision (ROD). These activities would disturb about 10,122 acres, which would be reduced to about 4,978 acres through interim reclamation.

Safeguarding natural resources, while allowing future energy development, was a top priority for BLM as the project progressed. Air quality, in particular, was a major concern.

“Protecting air quality has been at the forefront of our discussions as we developed the EIS,” said Jenna Whitlock, BLM’s acting Utah state director. “BLM worked with many partners to come up with a comprehensive air mitigation strategy to ensure emissions are minimized, and even offset. The plan we developed results in a ‘net zero’ increase from stationary sources such as tanks and compressor stations.”

Collaboration among BLM, Newfield Exploration Company, the Environmental Protection Agency, State of Utah and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was a key to reaching the decision.

“EPA values the cooperation between state, tribal, and federal partners to develop a creative air quality mitigation strategy for controlling emissions from this project,” said Martin Hestmark, Assistant Regional Administrator for the Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation.

The selected alternative also minimizes impacts to the Pariette Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern, avoids or minimizes effects to riparian floodplains, and avoids or minimizes and mitigates impacts to threatened plants. Directional drilling, a technique that requires a smaller space than conventional drilling, will keep new surface disturbance and habitat fragmentation within the project area to a minimum. Interim reclamation requirements will ensure that temporary disturbances are addressed and the permanent disturbance footprint is minimized to the extent practicable.

Gary Torres, BLM Green River District Manager, said “that this project demonstrates that cooperation is key to responsible energy development.”

“Newfield committed to go above and beyond to address air quality protection, in addition to the comprehensive mitigation strategies to protect threatened plants and wetlands, in order to responsibly develop the oil and gas resources on their existing leases,” he said.

The ROD does not directly authorize any ground-disturbing activities. Newfield Exploration Company or an affiliate must still submit applications for a specific project within the infill project areas before it is approved. The ROD is available at BLM’s ePlanning website, <http://go.usa.gov/xqjTJ>.

The project is estimated to generate about 540-600 million cubic feet of natural gas and about 335 million barrels of oil over the next 20 years. Total employment would peak at just under 500 jobs during build up phases and sustain 40-50 jobs over the life of the project. About \$73.6 million in taxes would be paid to Uintah and Duchesne counties and about \$138.7 million would be paid to the state.

Additional information is available from Stephanie Howard, (435)-781-4469. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact Howard during normal business hours. FIRS is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for leaving a message or question. Replies will be provided during normal business hours.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands.

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